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Six months on: Haiti and disaster risk reduction

Reconstruction will take years but Haiti must emerge safer said Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

It has been six months since a 7.0 earthquake hit Haiti, causing major damage to the capital, Port-au-Prince, and surrounding area. While a great deal has been achieved in the recovery effort since then – thanks to a massive humanitarian response – the reconstruction challenge remains daunting and full of challenges. Supporting people to rebuild their homes and lives continues to be the focus of the international community, which is committed to Haiti’s reconstruction and future.

“Reconstruction will take years but Haiti must emerge safer,” says Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. “After the tsunami six years ago, people have not yet fully recovered. Rebuilding involving all key national actors takes time and is a necessary step to make Haiti truly sustainable.”

As with other post-disaster situations, the guiding principle for all reconstruction efforts is to build back better, where homes, critical infrastructure and services, such as electricity and water, can withstand the impact of natural hazards. The focus of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) is to promote disaster risk reduction to protect from human, social, economic and environmental loss.

In Haiti, governments, civil society, the private sector and other UN agencies are working together to make the country more resilient against future disasters. The Hyogo Framework for Action – a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction efforts – provides guidance for reducing risk in Haiti. This includes installing early warning systems and conducting public preparedness drills before the hurricane season as well as improving urban planning, infrastructure and building safety, particularly in schools and hospitals.

According to the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti, an estimated 222,570 died and more than 300,000 were injured in the 12 January earthquake. Eight hospitals were totally destroyed and 22 seriously affected and about 80% of schools in Port-au-Prince were completely damaged.

“We shall continue working with the Haitian government and its many partners to help rebuild a safer Haiti,” stresses Margareta Wahlström. “Hopefully, no new hospital, school or public structure will be built without integrating disaster risk reduction principles into its design and construction.”

Port-au-Prince, Haiti, is one of the 60 cities that have signed up to the new ISDR campaign – *Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready* to be safer. The goal is to see 1,000 cities join by 2011.